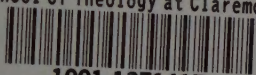


School of Theology at Claremont



1001 1371417

is on the

TWENTY-THIRD PSALM



CANON DUNCAN



BS
1450
23d
D8

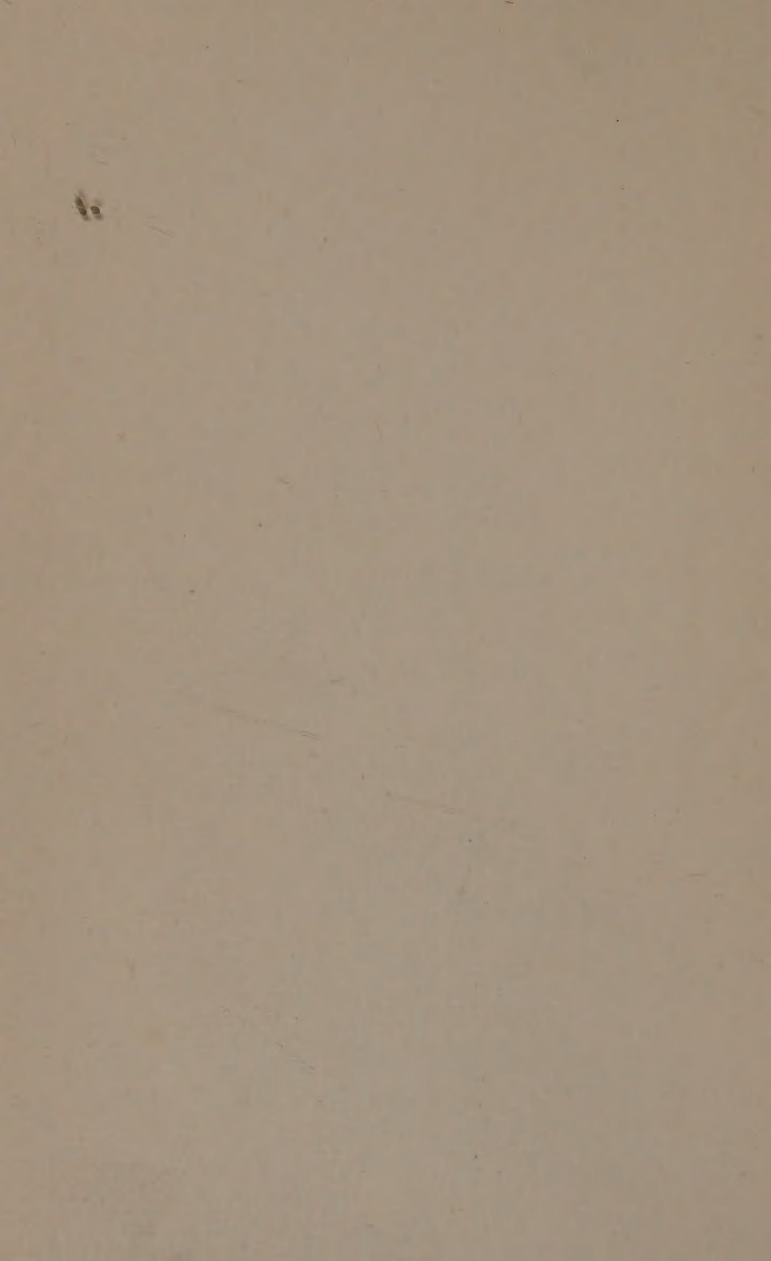


The Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT

WEST FOOTHILL AT COLLEGE AVENUE
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA







THE PSALM
OF LIFE.

By the Rev. CANON DUNCAN,

Vicar of St. Stephen's, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Cr. 8vo, cloth. Price 2/6, by post 2/9.

THE INHERITORS OF THE KINGDOM.
12 Sermons on the Beatitudes.

"Simple, helpful addresses, too profound for none, suggestive for all classes."—*Church Times*.

"Fresh water from this inexhaustible well of Holy Scripture."—*The Guardian*.

"Would that we had more Sermons like these."
—*The Record*.

THE PSALM OF LIFE.

EXPOSITORY SERMONS ON
PSALM XXIII.

BY THE REV.

CANON DUNCAN,

VICAR OF ST. STEPHENS, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE,

Author of "Inheritors of the Kingdom: Sermons on the Beatitudes."

London :

SKEFFINGTON & SON,
34, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.

Publishers to His Majesty the King.

1904.

Theology Library

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

TO
W. D. CRUDDAS, Esq., J.P.,
FOR 35 YEARS
CHURCHWARDEN
OF
ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH,
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

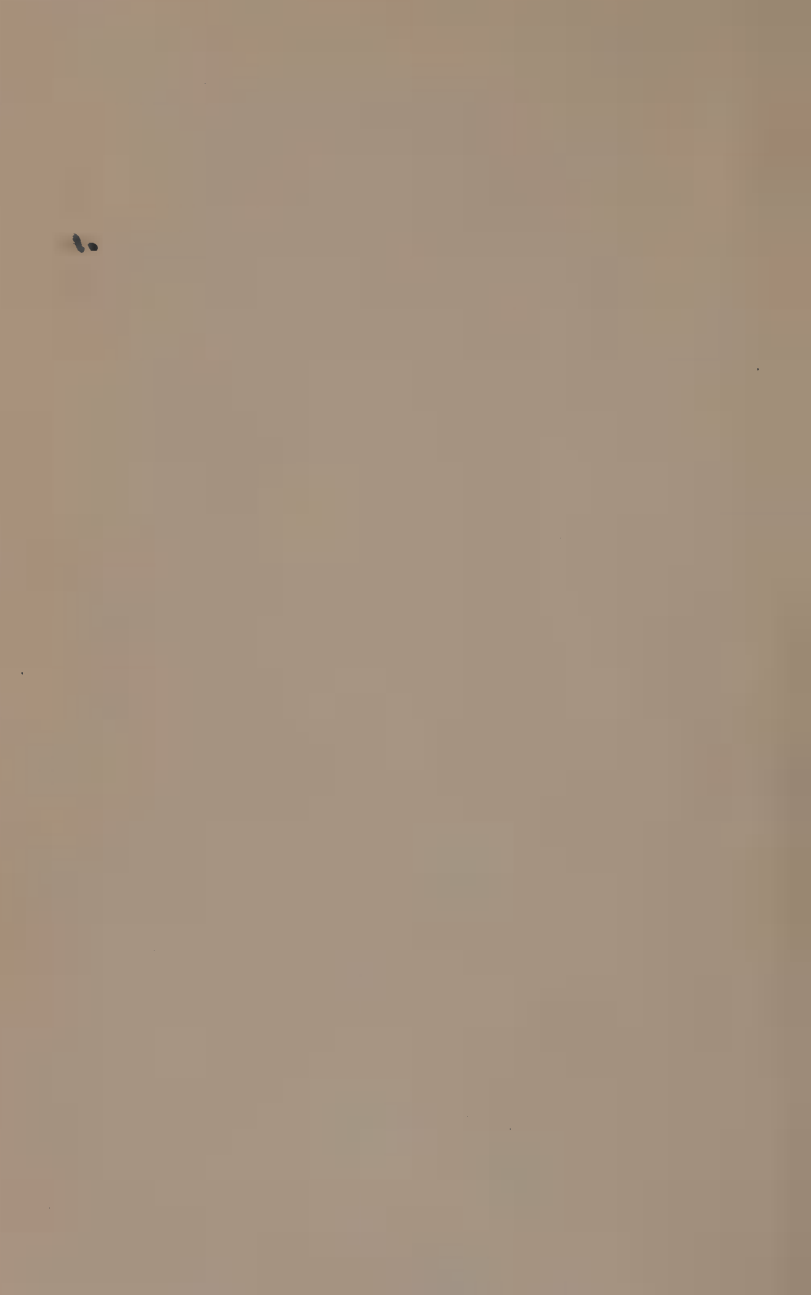


PREFACE.

FOUND to be a help and a comfort to many who listened to them, preached on consecutive Sunday evenings, these Sermons are now sent forth in this form, with the hope that they may be equally useful to many, who, in the quiet seclusion of home-life, are the objects of the Good Shepherd's love and care.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE DIVINE SHEPHERD	I
II. THE GREEN PASTURES	II
III. THE RESTORED SOUL	21
IV. THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH ...	32
V. THE PREPARED TABLE	42
VI. GOODNESS AND MERCY	52



The Psalm of Life.

I.

The Divine Shepherd.

PSALM XXIII I.

"The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want."



WE are apt to picture David as a youth, composing and singing this Psalm, as the expression of his own experience and faith, as he tended his father's sheep on the hills about Bethlehem. As a matter of fact we do not know at what period David wrote this Psalm, but we are inclined to think that he wrote it during the later years of his life, for there is a fulness of experience about it, a tone of quiet, subdued confidence, which speaks of a heart mellowed by advancing years, and of a faith made sober by many trials. Is it not the case of the old man looking back to the bright days

of The Divine Shepherd.

of youth, to his early occupations and pleasures, and to all the stormy years through which he has since passed, and then breaking out into this Psalm, blending youth with age, and early hope with ripe experience?

Anyhow, some 3,000 years have passed away since David first sung this pearl of Psalms, and though all his royal pomp and grandeur, all his earthly possessions and treasures, have long since passed away and are blended with the dust, yet this Psalm still lives, and is as fresh and welcome as ever, ministering relief to the perplexed, courage to the disappointed, comfort to the poor, and consolation to the sick and dying. Its words were about the first inspired words we were taught to repeat, when, as children, we were being trained for the Christian life; and they will probably be among the last words whispered in our ear, when, in the solemn twilight, we are passing into the life of Eternal Day! Come, then, old and young, and meditate upon this Psalm, and see how truly it expresses the life of your believing and confiding soul!

The Psalm lies, as it were, between the Cross and the Crown; between the twenty-second Psalm, which reveals the Lord as the Good Shepherd, laying down His life for the sheep, and the twenty-fourth Psalm,

The Divine Shepherd. so

which speaks of the Lord as the Chief Shepherd, leading His sheep home, that where He is, there they may be also.

I. THE DIVINE BEING, "*The LORD*."

This word, when thus printed in capital letters, stands for JEHOVAH, the name by which God specially revealed Himself to the Hebrews, and which was held by them to be so sacred that it was only pronounced by the high priest, and that once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, on entering the most Holy Place. It means the Self-existent, Unchangeable Being; the Almighty, Eternal God; Who revealed Himself by word and deed, as the Guide, Helper, Saviour, and Protector of His people. All others are dependent creatures: He is independent of all. All others change and decay: He is unchangeably the same. All others are of limited, very limited powers: He is Almighty. Well, this Almighty God, Whose we are, in Whom we live, and move, and have our being, and from Whom all our temporal and spiritual blessings flow, this great Jehovah of the Old Testament, is our Shepherd!

~~Moreover,~~ as we pass from the ages of the Old Testament dispensation, and step on to the threshold of the New; lo, on these very hills of Bethlehem,

❧ The Divine Shepherd.

where David proclaimed in song this great truth, a meek and lowly Man appears, on whom the shadow of the Cross is already falling ; and, addressing His disciples in these well-known words, He applies them to Himself, saying, "I am the Good Shepherd." Now, take and unite these two—the Old Testament name of our God, *Jehovah*, and the New Testament name of our Lord, *Jesus*—and what an All-sufficient, All-satisfying God we have. As Jehovah, the Everlasting Father ; and as Jesus, the Prince of Peace. As Jehovah, the Sovereign Lord of all ; and as Jesus, the Gracious Saviour of all. As Jehovah, full of Power ; and as Jesus, full of Sympathy. As Jehovah, our Creator and Preserver ; and as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, ever going before His sheep, and ever living to make intercession for us.

Now, if you would understand this Psalm aright, and enjoy it to the full, it is necessary that you should know "The Lord" to be *Jehovah—Jesus* ; you will never be established in the faith, never have joy and peace in believing, till you do. But you should know Him, for as sure as light came at the beginning of the earth's creation, so does light come at the beginning of the soul's salvation, to dispel its darkness, and enable it so to see the truth, and to "know the Lord," that, like St. Thomas, you may

The Divine Shepherd. 50

say, "My Lord and my God!" Then, with absolute confidence in Him, Who is both able and willing to feed, guide, and protect you, you may, though hungry, erring, and helpless, say, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep; for Thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety."

II. HIS GRACIOUS OFFICE—"SHEPHERD."

To fully appreciate this, we must remember all that an Eastern shepherd was to his flock. The sheep were his own, so he took great care of them. In the early morning he led them forth to pasture: all day long he watched them, lest harm came to them by swollen torrent, hill-robbers, or wild beasts: and at nightfall he led them back to the fold. At certain seasons he had to take them further away from the haunts of men in search of pasture, where he was exposed to the heat by day and to the frost by night. If a lamb was weak he carried it in his bosom; if a sheep wandered, he recalled or went after it; if danger assailed, he defended it. Thus living together, a mutual sympathy and love existed between them—the shepherd knew his sheep and was known of them.

You can see how true all this is of our blessed Lord, for He, indeed, has all the requisite qualities

§ The Divine Shepherd.

of "the Good Shepherd"—a good *heart*, beating with generous love for every sheep of His pasture; a good *head*, that knoweth His own sheep, their names, their nature, and their wants; a good *eye*, that takes in the whole flock, even the one that has gone astray; a good *courage*, that never fails His flock, and never flees when the wolf cometh; a good *strength*, that is able to deliver His sheep from the mouth of the lion or the paw of the bear; and good *sympathy*, for there is no lamb so small that He will not carry up hill, no sheep so weak that He will not gently lead, no soul so faint that He will not give it rest, and no wanderer so perverse that He will not seek and restore.

Yea, when "all we like sheep had gone astray, and turned everyone to his own way," and were lost in sin, and condemned by justice, He, from the fold of Heaven, saw our danger, and was moved with compassion, for we were "as sheep having no shepherd." So He, "the Good Shepherd," came to seek and to save us, by delivering us out of the hands of our enemies, and leading us back to the heavenly fold; and though the enemy turned from the sheep to the Shepherd, and justice lifted up its sword against Him, He neither complained nor fled, but "laid down His life for the sheep!"

The Divine Shepherd. 30

“He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.”

III. THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP—“*Is My*.”

If you know that you are the Lord's, you should know that “the Lord” is yours. Here, there is a glorious certainty about it. There is no “If”; no “I hope so”; but “the Lord *is My* Shepherd.” It is not that He is the Lord of the world, or the Shepherd of the human race, but He *is My* Shepherd. Whatever He be to others, He is a Shepherd to *Me*, for He cares for me, watches over me, leads me, and loves me. It is not the future tense, but the present,—even now I am under the pastoral care of Jehovah—Jesus. You know the difference between knowing about a thing, and possessing that thing; between knowing a house, and saying, “My house”; between knowing a child, and saying, “My child.” So there is a tremendous difference between knowing something about the Lord, and truthfully saying, “The Lord *is My* Shepherd.”

Why, it is the difference between despair and happiness. For if Jesus appeared in our midst, and gave us such indisputable evidence, that we could no longer doubt His existence and identity, it would profit us little, unless we could appropriate Him

of The Divine Shepherd.

as our own, and say—*My* Lord, and *My* God! Yet is not this just what many professing Christians want—personal interest in Jesus? personal relationship to Jesus? They know that He is the Saviour, that He died for all, that He invites all, that He is ready to receive all, and that He is the Shepherd of all His sheep; but, somehow, they fail to realize that He is the Shepherd of each one, and therefore that He is *their* Shepherd, and so they have no happiness in Christ, and know nothing of that “Peace of God which passeth all understanding.”

He Who is the Parent of the *whole* family is surely the Parent of *each* member of the family, and it is for the happiness of each member to realize this. Now, “The Lord” wants you to realize this. He wants to hear you speak of Him not only as the “Great Shepherd,” and the “Good Shepherd,” but as “*My* Shepherd.” Oh, do not distress yourself by doubting or wondering whether you are one of the sheep of His pasture. Look from yourself and your failings to Him and His qualifications, and be assured that your first cry to Him for help is a sign of the New life, and your first desire for communion is a proof of your relationship. As St. Augustine, on behalf of the Good Shepherd, said, long ago, to one thus anxious, “Thou couldst not thus cry

The Divine Shepherd. 50

out, if I had not given thee life; neither wouldst thou thus seek Me, if I had not found thee."

IV. A POSITIVE INFERENCE—"I shall not want."

Nōt because of my money, or property, or business, or profession; not because I have skill and wisdom wherewith to supply my wants, but because, "The Lord is My Shepherd." David knew what poor dependent creatures sheep are, but he remembered that as a shepherd, he was ever ready to do all in his power to supply the wants of his sheep. And he reasons from his own love to the love of the Shepherd of his soul. The Lord's love for His sheep cannot be less than the love I had for mine; I was always willing to supply their wants, though I was not always able to do so; but the Lord is not only always willing, He is always able,—therefore "I shall not want." Others may be richer, or stronger, or wiser than I, but "I shall not want"; I may have to change my pasture, but I shall never want a pasture. "The young lions *do* lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

Probably some of you are thinking that this is not your experience; for you have been wanting something for a long time. Well, perhaps you have not yet made your requests known unto God; or perhaps you have not yet appropriated the supplies

of The Divine Shepherd.

which God hath placed at your hands ; or perhaps your time of need has not yet fully come ; or perhaps you have been asking amiss,—asking for something which is not good for you. No sensible parent gives his children everything they want ; he only gives them what he thinks good and necessary. The parent, not the children, is the judge. In our childishness we often “ask amiss.” But we must allow our Heavenly Father to exercise His wisdom, and give us only those things which are really good for us. He hath bread enough and to spare both for body and soul, and He will take care that His children “shall not want.”

And cannot His children bear testimony to the truth of this? How often, when we have tendered a little sympathy to a poor deserving soul, have we got the cheery reply, “Oh, no, I am not badly off ; I have a Heavenly Father, and He does not suffer me to want”? The pasture may get blighted at times, and become rather bare and barren, but He is not tied to place or to means, and, in some way or other, the Lord will provide. Go forth, then, ye sheep of His pasture, and though fully conscious of your helplessness and ignorance, and of your daily wants, let this be your hope and joy,—your full assurance of faith—

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD ; I SHALL NOT WANT.”

II.

The Green Pastures.

PSALM XXIII. 2.

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : He leadeth me beside the still waters.”



OUR text pictures the scorching hour of an Eastern noontide, when the air is stifling, the landscape baking in the awful heat, and the cattle are panting for air and moisture. But the shepherd, knowing a little green glen, through which a quiet brook flows, and where there is moist pasturage all along its course, and great rocks throwing their welcome shadow over the dewy grass, has led his flock thither ; and there the flock feed and drink, till, refreshed by the green pastures and the still waters, and the cool, quiet surroundings of that well-chosen vale, they lie down satisfied and at rest, till the outside oppression is past, and the shepherd calls them forth again to follow him.

Thus the Psalm begins with this picture of *rest*,

☞ The Green Pastures.

as that which best expresses the shepherd's care, and the chief "want" of our earthly and spiritual life; for the body cannot be restored to health, nor the soul to God, without rest. The midday rest, the nightly repose, and the weekly Sabbath are no arbitrary rules, but necessary "wants" for our well-being. We must have rest, pauses by the way, times of refreshment in all our lives. The head cannot be always thinking, nor the hands working, nor the faculties exercised. We may snap the main-spring, and bring the machinery to a standstill, if we overwind this wonderful but delicate system of ours. As with the body, so with the soul, it must have its times of rest, its quiet communions with God; so "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters."

I. THE GREEN PASTURES.

1. The Good Shepherd *provides* the green pastures, where his sheep find rest and refreshment. A hungry sheep will not lie down, even force will fail to make it; but the shepherd who provides his sheep with plenty of good pasturage will soon find even the most restless of them lie down contentedly in the midst of their blessings. So the soul can never rest till its hunger is appeased and its thirst quenched.

The Green Pastures. 50

Strange that men are so slow to realize this! Conscious of their hunger and thirst, they, like panting sheep, are turning hither and thither for something to satisfy them, something to fill the aching void within. Even the husks that the swine eat are sought and tried, but in vain. There is no satisfaction, no rest for the soul, till it responds to the voice of Him Who said, "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

And what are these "green pastures" but the *Sacred Scriptures*, which are always fresh, ever rich, and never exhausted! Here, indeed, there is food and drink for all hungry souls; here there is bread enough and to spare. Nor do these pastures ever become barren by time, nor bare by use. Though multitudes of commentators have considered them, and myriads of Christians have studied them, yet is there nourishment for every devout soul. Rich and good are the truths of the Gospel—as good for the soul as the tender grass for the sheep; and when by faith we follow the Good Shepherd into these pastures of His providing, and partake of these truths, are we not like sheep that have "peace and provender, rest and refreshment, security and satisfaction"?

23 The Green Pastures.

2. But the Good Shepherd *constrains* His sheep —“He *maketh* me.” We should never have had the desire for that food had He not created it; we should never have entered these pastures had He not led the way; we should never have found out the preciousness of the truth, nor fed upon it, had He not enabled us to do so. Yea, has He not at times been compelled to use a little force with us? He loves us too well to let us have our own way. Grieved at our obstinacy, but knowing our need, “He *maketh* us lie down in green pastures.” We have seen a shepherd take his sheep away from a bare, barren place to a meadow where the pasture was fresh and nourishing, but the sheep are obstinate, and will not enter; so, with stick and dog, he “maketh” them.

It is so with some of Christ's sheep. They are obstinate, and seem to prefer the bare and barren pasture of the world to the one He has provided for them; they will not enter it, or remain in it, and so He has to make them. Could not some of us bear witness to having experienced this gracious compulsion? When adversity and difficulty met us at every turn, constraining us to retrace our steps, was it not the Good Shepherd making us “lie down in green pastures”? When sickness arrested our course, and laid us upon the bed of sickness, with

The Green Pastures.

plenty of time for meditation, was it not the Good Shepherd making us "lie down in green pastures"? When bereavement darkened alike our heart and home, was it not the Good Shepherd making us "lie down in green pastures," to realize His Divine presence, and to feed on His means of grace for our souls' good?

3. But there is *conscious safety* in the sheep that thus "lie down." The roar of a lion, the bark of a dog, the shout of a child, will startle a flock of sheep, and drive them, frightened and trembling, to the further side of the meadow. And how can we rest while the enemy of our soul is near, or when dangers are at hand which may affect our eternal welfare? But the consciousness that the Good Shepherd has made ample provision for these dangers, by breaking the power of our enemy, blunting his temptations, overcoming death, and giving us not only the blessed assurance of His Presence, but also the gracious promise, "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." This enables the soul to lie down and rest.

In the Catacombs of Rome this short, touching epitaph is frequently seen—"In Christo, in pace!"—"In Christ, in peace!" How truly does that

of The Green Pastures.

epitaph describe the feelings of the sheep of His pasture! Respond to the Good Shepherd's call, enter and abide in His fold, and become conscious of His blessed presence, then, whether your earthly lot be liberty, luxury, and applause, or the Catacombs, poverty, and reproach, it will be, "In Christo, in pace!"—"In Christ, in peace!"

"No words can tell what blest relief,
There for my every want I find;
What strength for warfare, balm for grief;
What peace of mind.

Hush'd is each doubt; gone every fear;
My spirit seems in heaven to stay;
And even the penitential tear
Is wiped away."

II. THE STILL WATERS.

I. These waters may represent the work of the *Holy Spirit*. For as the pastures would soon lose their greenness and vitality if the waters ceased to flow about them, so would the means of grace soon lose their efficacy if the Holy Spirit ceased to exercise His hallowed influence upon them and us. Why, is it not His office, like water, to cleanse us from the defiling effects of sin, that we may receive the seed of the Word in an honest and good heart? Is it

The Green Pastures. So

not His office, like water, to refresh our faith, when we are weary and worn with the burden and heat of the day, or depressed by the adverse circumstances of life? Is it not His office, like water, to fertilize our barren souls with His grace and fostering care, that we may become fruitful in every good work?

They are "*Still Waters*," that is, waters of *rest*—not violent rivers, that would affright the sheep with their noise, and expose them to be carried away by the swift torrents, but still, quiet, peaceful waters, an emblem at once of a mind that is satisfied with its God, and enjoys every word that proceedeth out of His mouth. "*Still waters run deep*"; here they are deep enough for all. But they are "*Still Waters*," for the Holy Spirit flows quietly and peacefully into the soul; for He is as a dove and not as an eagle: as the dew and not as a hurricane; and therefore the Good Shepherd leads us, not to waters of strife and bitterness, but to the *Still Waters* of peace and love, as exhibited in His own earthly life.

2. "He leadeth me." As in the East the shepherd always precedes his flock, to discover the green pastures and the best way to them, so our Lord ever keeps in front of His sheep. He leads, and so draws the trustful sheep after him. The space between the

❧ The Green Pastures.

Good Shepherd and me is so great, that it is like a great gulf fixed, a hopeless chasm that I cannot cross! But it is bridged over by one welcome word, "He *leadeth* me." Of old the Apostles could see Him "leading" in front of them, as He went on towards Jerusalem; but that is not possible to us as we wend our way towards the Holy City. We cannot see that gracious Form treading earth's pathways; we love and follow One Whom we have not seen; but though He is as invisible to us as the power that leads worlds through space, yet does He as surely lead to His own blessings.

Yes, we have a leader, the Lord our Shepherd! Moses drives us by the Law, but the Lord leads us by His own example, and by the gentle drawings of His own love. Thus we have One to look to. Ours is no aimless journey, no unknown path, no interminable road. There is One before us Who knows the way, Whose feet have trodden the path we are treading, and Whose command is not "Go!" but "Come, follow Me!" However rough the road, however unknown to us, can we not step out with confidence when we know that our wise and gracious Leader has been over the road before us, and that He is leading us to blessings which He has prepared for us, and in which we shall find rest unto our souls.

The Green Pastures. So

3. Yes, we must *follow*. The most skilful shepherd would fail to bring his flock of sheep to green pastures and still waters unless they follow him. If they lag behind, if they wilfully go astray, if they turn every one to his own way, then, however skilful the shepherd, and good his intentions, he must be thwarted. But our Lord says, "My sheep hear My voice; and I know them, and they *follow* Me." Is it not natural that we should lose our rest, when we run hither and thither, following the devices and desires of our own hearts? When we wilfully substitute our plans for His, and pursue our own way, without so much as looking to see which way He is going, what He would have us do, and whither He would have us go? We must "*follow* the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," if we would be led to the "Still Waters" of rest and comfort.

We live in a very restless age; an age of excitement, of hurry, and of grinding competition. We have "no leisure so much as to eat"; and our Lord's merciful request to His disciples, now, as of old, is—"Come ye apart and rest awhile!" Ye need it to revive your powers, and ye need it to fit you for your work. Oh, ye restless souls, sigh not for the Lord's rest, as though it were not for you! He is more anxious for your welfare than you are for your own.

§ The Green Pastures.

He has already prepared the green pastures and the still waters, where true satisfaction can be found, and true rest enjoyed, and He waits to lead you thither. Hear ye not His voice? If so, follow Him; and thus be among those faithful sheep of His pasture who can each testify—

“HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES :
HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.”

III.

The Restored Soul.

PSALM XXIII. 3.

“He restoreth my soul : He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.”

OTWITHSTANDING the “green pastures” and the “still waters,” sheep are very apt to go astray. Even when they are well cared for, receive every attention, and have everything that is really good and necessary for their welfare, yet will they longingly look through the hedge, and if there be an opening in it, they cannot resist the temptation to push their way through ; and, once outside, they seem to have neither instinct nor capacity to enable them to return. On and on they go, from bad to worse ; till famishing with hunger, entangled in the woods, or crippled through some fall, they bleat for help, as they think of the comfort and security they have lost, and now helplessly desire ; and thus they continue till they are found

of The Restored Soul.

by the shepherd, and restored by him to the fold.

Is not all this just like the sheep of Christ's pasture?

However well cared for, however richly blessed—in our lives, in our souls, in our homes—yet to wander away seems to be our natural bent. Most of us can, every time we kneel before God in His Sanctuary, truthfully say, "We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts." I suppose it has been so in all ages; but it certainly is very much so in our age—acknowledged and gloried in outside the Church, felt and deplored within the Church, mourned, and, may we say, prayed over by every devout member of it, that we cannot begin our exposition of this text more profitably than by trying to answer the question—How is it that we so easily relapse, as to make it necessary for the Good Shepherd to restore us?

I. CAUSES OF RELAPSE.

1. *Neglecting the means of grace.* Any student who has examinations before him, knows that he must keep at his studies as regular as the clock, and that if he does so he enjoys his subjects, makes progress in them, and that his success is sure. But if

The Restored Soul. 50

he breaks this rule, and, even for a time, neglects his studies for other things, his interest in them soon goes, and it is then a tremendous struggle for him to get back to them. It is so with the means of grace. They are for regular use, and the Christian student who regularly studies his Bible, frequents the public means of grace, and attends to his private devotions, finds great enjoyment in them, and certainly "grows in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." But if he neglects these things, his interest in them is soon lost, and then nothing short of the Good Shepherd's influence can restore his soul.

And yet how easily we slide into this neglect—squeezing ourselves, as it were, through any hole, to be out of the fold. Any hot, cold, or wet weather, any domestic inconvenience, any friendly call, is thought a sufficient excuse to absent oneself from public worship! Any pressure of time, any indisposition of body, any irritability of mind, an excuse for neglecting the private study of the Scriptures, or private communion with God! And even when these things are observed, how cold and formal we often are. Progress, we fear, is rarely desired, and God's blessing never really sought. Is it then to be wondered at that enjoyment in the means of grace is

☞ The Restored Soul.

lost by us, that the energies of our spiritual life decline, and that we come to need the intervention of the Good Shepherd, to seek, to find, and restore us.

2. *Too much intercourse with the world* tends to weaken our spiritual life. Of course, as followers of Christ, our mission is to influence the world for good. We were called out from the world to lead a separate and a higher life, that by word and deed and good example we may influence the world for Christ. But it is to be feared that we have become too much a part of the world, that the line of separation has almost disappeared, and the duty of influencing for Christ is almost forgotten. Yet it is impossible for a Christian to spend his time in the world, amid its frivolous pursuits, its empty literature, its trifling talk, its banter, its ridicule, its profanity, and its corruptions, without losing his Christian brightness, without resembling a piece of plate that is too much exposed to the atmosphere; it continues to be a piece of plate, but it becomes so dull and tarnished as to need constant cleansing and restoring.

Of course, if the Holy Spirit leads us into the world, as He led the Lord Jesus into the wilderness, He will preserve us there, and even enable us to bear

The Restored Soul. 50

witness to the truth ; but we shall soon lose our power for good, and decline in spiritual health, if we choose to go and settle there. How many, once promising Christians, whom we hoped would become as pillars in the Church of Christ, and be powerful instruments for good in their own worldly sphere, have relapsed at this point! They chose not to live the separate and higher life, and to influence the world from that standpoint, but to go and live with the world, making its talk and conversation, its pleasures and pursuits their own, with the result that they are now “of the world,” and are to Christ and His Church as lost sheep.

3. *Harbouring sin* in the heart or life is a sure cause of relapse. It need not be what is called a big sin—fraud, adultery, murder ; for any little sin—lying, pilfering, etc., is a “transgression of the law,” and assuredly alienates the soul from God. Why, if there be between friends a disagreement, however trivial, they shrink from meeting each other. I have known two such keep away from Church for months, lest by coming they should meet each other! And if by chance they happened to meet, what a cold, stiff, repelling meeting it was! There can be no more warm friendship between them till the

as The Restored Soul.

wrong be confessed, or till the misunderstanding be explained. It is so with our relationship with God. Any wilfully indulged sin produces in us an aversion to God's presence, and disposes us, like our first parents, to go and hide ourselves from Him!

Let me warn, especially my younger friends, against supposing that you can harbour your little sins and yet keep a good conscience, or that you can indulge in "secret faults" and yet advance in the Christian life. You may for a time deceive the congregation, but you know that you are not deceiving God. You may for a time frequent the means of grace, but your own soul is not at rest; and unless you pluck out the right eye, or cut off the right hand of sin, and cast it from you, your attendance at the means of grace will become less and less, and your drifting from Christ more and more rapid. The example prayer of David, who passed through this sort of ordeal, may safely become your model—"Cleanse Thou me from secret faults, keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me."

II. THE RESTORATION.

I. "*He restoreth my soul.*" As one has said, the work of restoration is ever going on all around us.

The Restored Soul. 50

If a rent is made on the hillside, nature at once begins to festoon it with grass, and fern, and creeper. If a wound is made in our body, nature at once sets itself to work to close the breach and bring about a cure. Even when death makes a gap in the family, time, with its influences, begins to fill up the aching void. When a sheep is missed from the flock, the shepherd goes after it until he find it, and he then restores it to the fold. So the Good Shepherd is ever looking over His flock, and is ever devising means of restoration, so that when the soul becomes sorrowful He revives it; when it is weak He strengthens it; when it is sinful He cleanses it; and when it is lost He seeks and restores it, from danger to safety, from misery to joy, from death unto life. *He* does it, for no one else can.

He, of course, uses means, and any means are powerful and effectual when used by Him. Just think of the means he used to restore His erring disciple St. Peter. He warned him, He prayed for him, and in the Judgment Hall He gave him that tender, reproachful, convicting look—"The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." On the resurrection morn He commissioned His angels to bid the women "Go and tell Peter that He was risen," that St. Peter might be assured that the Lord still desired his restoration.

§ The Restored Soul.

He then appeared unto the Apostle *alone* on that Easter morn, that St. Peter might pour out his penitence, unrestrained by any human presence ; and then the Lord finished the work of restoration, by giving St. Peter an opportunity of wiping out the memory of his thrice denial, by thrice attesting, before the assembled disciples, his love for Jesus, in the words, "Lord, Thou knowest all things ; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

2. "*He leadeth me into the paths of righteousness.*" It was necessary to be led to green pastures and still waters, and necessary for the soul to be restored, but the Christian life is not a fold to lie down in, but paths to walk in—we have to go on to perfection. And the Good Shepherd "does not *only* give us comfort ; that would weaken character. He gives us power ; for the true Comforter is the strengthener in pain, not the remover of it." And as in a pasturage there are several paths running side by side to one point, so there are several paths of Christian duty—faith, hope, love, obedience, holiness—straight and right paths, all leading to one point ; and the Good Shepherd "leadeth us into these paths of righteousness," proved to be "right" paths by God's testimony and by man's experience.

The Restored Soul. 50

Perhaps you doubt this, for to you the paths have appeared so difficult and so very perplexing. But, brethren, do not judge God's ways while they are in progress; wait till they are complete; wait till the tapestry is finished, and you can see the other side, where the pattern is being worked out; wait till you have got out of the valley, and are on the brow of the hill, and then, as you look back, you will see that He has led you "the right way." We are told that in the forests of Africa there are no end of cross roads and bye-paths, which are apt to perplex the traveller; but the Africans fell trees, and lay them across all bye-paths, leaving only the main road clear. Now our path is through a tangled sort of forest; but our Lord has laid His warnings and commands across all bye-paths, and our perplexity is caused by hankering after them; for the main road is clear enough, and the Spirit of Christ leadeth us into them, whispering "This is the way, walk ye in it."

3. "*For His Name sake.*" As He hath taken upon Himself the Name of "the *Good Shepherd*," He must keep up the reputation of that Name, and be good to us, and do good for us, in spite of our badness! "For His Name sake!" Oh, what a plea is that,

of The Restored Soul.

as I look from my poor erring heart up to the heart of the Good Shepherd, to feel sure that He will not deny Himself, nor belie His character, nor do anything inconsistent with His tender love for the sheep of His pasture! That though I have erred and gone astray, and proved myself quite unworthy of His love and care, yet He will, "for His Name sake," restore my soul, and lead me into the paths of righteousness, if I but respond to His call.

"Just as I am; Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!"

And, brethren, remember, that to act thus is characteristic of a sheep. A sow wallows in the mire, for that mire is congenial to its nature; but not so the sheep, for though it may fall into the mire, yet it loathes the mire, and bleats to be drawn out, and it is this bleating that brings the shepherd to its aid. So the Good Shepherd "restoreth them that are penitent," them that have wandered, and fallen into the mire, and loathe it, and yet are unable to extricate themselves. If such be your lot, you can believe in the Shepherd's goodness, you *can* call out to Him in

The Restored Soul. 50

prayer, and if you do you shall realize that He is both waiting to be gracious, and is able to make this word true—

“HE RESTORETH MY SOUL: HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE.”

IV.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death.

PSALM XXIII. 4.

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff
they comfort me.”



ANY old writers speak of this Psalm as
“The Nightingale Psalm of David.”
Probably because it is generally heard in
the dark, and sweetly enters the mourner’s ear in
his night of weeping, and prepares him for the morn-
ing of joy. But one has very beautifully compared
the Psalm to the lark, which sings as he mounts, and
mounts as he sings, until he is out of sight, and even
then he is not out of hearing! A type, surely, of
those loved ones whose angelic notes used to break
in upon our ears in the darkened solitude of afflic-
tion; and whose notes, though they grew fainter,
nevertheless grew sweeter as they passed out of sight,
leaving within us an assurance that there is a glorious

The Valley of the Shadow of Death. ~~so~~

life of joy and gladness beyond our earthly vision.

In our text the shepherd is still leading his sheep to the fold ; but now the scenery changes, for the path begins to descend into a dark valley or ravine ; on either side are steep mountain slopes, with their dark fir trees, and there is the noise of rushing waters far below. All along are caverns and suspicious-looking places, often used as tombs for the dead, and where robbers and wild beasts are ever lurking after their prey. Such a place is dark and dangerous even at noonday. Now what the Psalmist here means is, that though in passing through life he be brought into the midst of dangers, as deep as a valley, as dark as a shadow, and as dreadful as death itself, yet he will fear no evil, for the Lord is with him. But though this is, I think, the meaning of the text, yet, as it has always been looked upon as a picture of the close of our earthly life, with a dark valley at the end, through which we pass, let us follow this picture, and learn its many lessons.

I. LIFE IN DEATH.

I. "*Though I walk.*" Death is not the fixed state, or the final dwelling-place of the righteous, but a transition, "a walk." The passage may be dark, drear, and dangerous, but we do not settle there, we

§ The Valley of the Shadow of Death.

walk on. The soul will leave the body, as a tradesman leaves his closed shop at eventide, and walks on to join the home-circle that is awaiting him. "To walk," as one says, "indicates the steady advance of a soul that knows its road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed. Such a soul is not flurried in its departure, it does not run as though it were alarmed, it does not stand still as though it would go no further; but being neither confounded nor ashamed, it walks calmly and peacefully on towards its known destination."

For it is a "walk *through*." Though the soul has "not passed this way heretofore," nevertheless there is no uncertainty as to this path or that, no vague wandering hither and thither, till, like a benighted traveller, it gives up in despair, feeling that all is lost. No, there is no getting lost in that passage; it is a "walk through." A traveller tells us that in Damascus he was conducted down a long, dark, narrow lane which ended in a tunnel, and through this he had to pass; but it emerged into the courtyard of the palace, where he desired to be, and which suddenly flashed upon him with all the colour and sunshine of Oriental display! Now the Christian's passage is as a "walk through" a tunnel, whereby

The Valley of the Shadow of Death. ~~so~~

he emerges into the light of immortality. His senses are darkened, though but for a moment. He does not die, he only sleeps, and then awakens in glory.

2. "Though I walk through *the valley*." Above the valley is the mountain, but that is the place for the storm ; there the lightnings flash and the thunders roll, and the cold wintry blast howls by ; it is a bare, bleak, harassing place to walk over. But it is not over the mountain, but "through the valley," that the departing saints walk, for though it may be deep, dark, and miry betimes, nevertheless it is a sheltered, fruitful spot ; there all is calm and quiet, and there the rich sheaves ripen and are gathered. Ah, it is not through ignorance, or by mistake, that the Good Shepherd takes His sheep through the valley, towards the close of their journey, but through wisdom and by design, for, rightly considered, it is for their relief and protection, to draw and keep them nearer to Himself, and to develop and perfect those Christian graces which shall qualify and prepare them for the Heavenly Fold.

Why, how often have the last days of the Christian been the most peaceful of his life ! How often, during that brief passage, has he been conscious of the Saviour's presence, showing him "the path of

❧ The Valley of the Shadow of Death.

life"? How often, during that "walk through the valley," has he reaped more knowledge and joy than he ever did during the whole of his previous career? Have you yourselves not been witness of the most wonderful patience and resignation, the most beautiful peace and calm and hopeful cheerfulness on the part of some dear ones, who had been led into the valley, and who were there, shut in and sheltered from the rough outside world, with the conscious presence of the Good Shepherd, and, in spite of the sore progress of disease, and of physical exhaustion, fully assured that they were "passing over to the other side"?

3. "*The shadow of death.*" We cannot deny that this shadow falls upon the soul as it passes "through the valley." Disease and pain often oppress the soul and overshadow it with gloom, which is often misunderstood both by the sufferer and his friends. It is hard to endure bodily pain; hard to part from those we love; hard at such a time to encounter the prince of darkness; and it is a solemn, serious thing to feel that you are passing into the presence of God! But it is only "*the shadow of death*" through which we pass, for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Christ

The Valley of the Shadow of Death. so

met the substance, we encounter but the shadow. When a wasp leaves its sting in anyone, it has no more power to hurt. Death left its sting in Christ, as He hung upon the Cross, and he has now no power to hurt us, as St. Paul exclaimed, "O death, where is thy sting?"

Pray do not forget that it is not the valley of death, but the "valley of the *shadow* of death." No doubt the shadow is the counterpart of its substance, but that shadow cannot stop your pathway, cannot hurt you, and it should not frighten you. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a serpent cannot sting; and the shadow of death cannot destroy. Someone has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere. So there is. Death stands by the pathway along which we have to travel, and the light from Heaven falling upon him throws a shadow across our path; but we walk through the shadow, and thus pass into the full light of perfect day. No wonder one has said—

" Meanwhile, along the narrow rugged path
Thyself hast trod,
Lead, Saviour, lead me home in childlike faith,
Home to my God;
To rest for ever after earthly strife,
In the calm light of everlasting life."

✧ The Valley of the Shadow of Death.

II. LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

1. "*I will fear no evil.*" He does not say that there are no evils. Sickness, pain, loneliness, darkness, and death are evils, but he is sure that his Saviour has overcome them all, and that He overcame them for the benefit of His people who come after Him. If the lion, the bear, or the serpent be in or near my path, they are chained and under control—"I will *fear* no evil." Most of us can testify that the worst evils of life are those which only exist in our imagination. If we had no troubles but real ones our troubles would be very few indeed. We feel a thousand troubles in dreading one. The future, the unknown troubles, are what we most dread, and these generally never happen. A little noise in the dark fills us with fear, which is generally turned into amusement when we ascertain the cause.

"There is no fear in love; perfect love casteth out fear." Nothing else can cast it out. You cannot argue fear away; you cannot laugh it out of your being; you cannot shame it out of your soul; but you can cast it out by perfect love. A mother, perhaps naturally weak and nervous, will plunge into the river, or rush into a burning house to rescue her child; her perfect love casting out fear. Daniel could face the lion's den; the three Hebrew youths

The Valley of the Shadow of Death. so

the burning fiery furnace ; Apostles, saints, and martyrs the prison, the rack, and the block ; David, and thousands of Christian men, women and children, the valley of the shadow of death, because their perfect love for God and His Christ enabled them to cast out fear !

2. "*For Thou art with Me!*" It is not David's knowledge, or strength, or courage that inspires him, but the conscious presence of the Good Shepherd. You must notice here the change in the pronoun. Hitherto David has spoken of the Good Shepherd in the *third* person, but now, as "the darkness deepens," he draws so close to his Divine Guide that he can talk to Him as in a whisper, and say, "*Thou* are with me!" When we are in the green pastures and by the still waters ; when things are all prospering, and ourselves and households are fully enjoying the pleasures and securities of life, we think it enough to speak about the Lord being our Shepherd ; but when the sky darkens, and dangers seem imminent, we must hasten to His side and talk to Him.

"I remember," says an old writer on this text, "how, when I was crossing the moor one eventide, my little boy was very busy on his own account, ever lagging behind, or running first to the right and then

§ The Valley of the Shadow of Death.

to the left, after this pebble or that daisy. But when the rumbling thunder broke upon our ears, and some big rain-drops came pattering down, then he came close by my side, took hold of my hand, and began to talk about home." So it is when we get into the valley, amid manifold dangers and temptations, we draw near to our Divine Guide, and it is the consciousness of His presence that banishes fear, and gives the full assurance of faith; "God is our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble; therefore will we not fear."

3. "*Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*" The Eastern shepherd carries a rod or staff with him whenever he goes forth with his sheep. It is generally bent or hooked at one end, which gave rise to the pastoral staff in the hand of the Christian Bishop. With this staff he rules his sheep and guides them to and from the green pastures. With it he reclaims them when they wander, recovers them when they fall into places of danger, and defends them when man or beast seeks their injury. So they have not only the comfort of his presence, but the comfort of knowing that his wisdom and skill, his care and power, are daily being exerted for their benefit, and are always at their disposal. So we read, "Thus

The Valley of the Shadow of Death. so

saith the Lord God, Behold, I will both search My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that his sheep are scattered, so will I seek out My sheep, and deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

Thus we may walk on through the valley, learning many a precious lesson by the way. The valley may not be known to us, but it is well known to our Good Shepherd. We have not been through it before, but He has; for He came not only to seek and to save us, but also to make for us a "path of life," right "through the valley of the shadow of death," and thereby lead us safely home. And He comes to meet us at the entrance of the valley, to be our Companion and Guide all the way; and it is with the knowledge and consciousness of this that we, at the eventide of life, can confidently turn our faces homewards and say—

"YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE
SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR
Thou ART WITH ME; *Thy* ROD AND *Thy* STAFF
THEY COMFORT ME."

V.

The Prepared Table.

PSALM XXIII. 5.

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : Thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over.”



NO one figure can possibly express the full relationship that exists between God and His people, the scene here changes from that of a Shepherd and his sheep to that of a King and his guests. For, after all, there can be no real communion, no real fellowship between a shepherd and his sheep. The little child, running out from the roadside cottage to clasp the hand of his father, has a closer communion and a more intimate fellowship with him, than the dumb creature of his care. So what David now means is, that the Lord is not only my Shepherd, He is also my Host ; I am not only His sheep, but I am also His guest ; and “He prepareth a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

The Prepared Table. 50

To do this is a more convincing proof of His care and power than was His leading us to the "green pastures." The hills around David had at times been covered with his enemies, organized to hunt him down ; but, in some wonderful way, God spread the table before him, in the very presence of those enemies, and they were not able to stop his supplies. We also have our enemies, not only the world, the flesh, and the devil, but an endless number of agents of evil who are ever plotting against our welfare ; but they cannot cut off God's supplies, they cannot hinder those ministering angels who spread the table, and then form themselves into an inner circle of defence round about us. Let us consider—

I. THE PREPARED TABLE.

1. It is prepared for our *temporal wants*. Our God has a very large family. He has to provide for every living creature in Heaven above and earth beneath. Of course, angels and archangels and all the heavenly host are watched over and cared for by Him ; but surely He is most attentive to the wants of His own children, those who can call Him "Our Father," and He does carefully prepare for them—in the presence of their enemies ; in the presence of adversity, bereavement, poverty, sickness, and the

❧ The Prepared Table.

most impossible sort of circumstances. I well remember expounding this Psalm by the bedside of a poor woman who was blind and crippled with rheumatism. She stopped me at this verse to give her testimony, saying, "We were poor enough when my husband was living, God knows! But when he died, leaving me helpless in bed, and with four children, I knew not what would become of us! But seven years have passed away since then, and I cannot remember the day when there was not something to eat in the cupboard!"

We know that some folk complain because they are not "better off," or because they are not so well off as many who are in the world. But let such enquire whether they are really living in dependence upon God. Whether they turn, as children, in faith to their Heavenly Father for the fulfilment of His promises. But, after all, is it not unbecoming for a professed Christian to be fretfully hankering after worldly things, and thus meriting the rebuke—"After all these things do the Gentiles seek: Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." A child, anxious and fretful about to-morrow's breakfast, could not be a very pleasant sight for a parent, and would probably receive as answer, "My child, go to bed! It is my

The Prepared Table. &c

duty to see to the breakfast; and when to-morrow morning comes you will probably find breakfast ready!"

2. The table is also prepared for our *spiritual wants*. There is that beautifully sympathetic event in our Lord's risen life, when the disciples returned to shore with empty boats, after toiling all night and taking nothing, how they found a feast prepared for them by the thoughtful kindness of their Lord: for "as soon as they came to land they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." And "Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine!" Is not that a picture of the means of grace which our Blessed Lord hath so bountifully prepared for our souls? For how often, when tired and disappointed, we pull, as it were, to the shore, harassed by many anxious cares and fears, only to find that He is there awaiting us, that He has anticipated our wants, and made ample provision for our soul's good!

More especially is this true as regards the Lord's Supper. For our Blessed Lord first prepared that feast, consecrated the elements, and dispensed the blessings to His assembled guests. And every devout Communicant feels that the Lord still presides at His Holy Table, communicating His grace,

§ The Prepared Table.

and "all other benefits of His Passion," to every pious soul present. It is to be feared that many Christians are too forgetful as to the necessity of attending this feast. They are diligent in all sorts of work, in attending Church conferences, and in reading theological books, but too forgetful of the feast at the Lord's Table for the nourishment of their spiritual life. It is most desirable to communicate regularly, not only as a means of keeping our souls in close communion with our Lord, but also that by means of that bread and wine—the emblems of all good things—we may thus acknowledge Him to be the "Giver of every good and perfect gift"; and thus "feed on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving."

II. THE ANOINTED HEAD.

✍ It was *the custom* at an Eastern feast for the host to welcome his guest *by anointing him* with fragrant perfumes. If the guest was as little welcome as Jesus was in the house of Simon this act of courtesy would be omitted. But if the guest was both welcome, and the object of love and gratitude, then the perfumes would be costly and liberally used, as they were by Mary of Bethany. Now we know, from the teaching both of the Old and New Testa-

The Prepared Table. 50

ments, how this anointing was applied to our Blessed Lord on His coming into the world to be for a time its Guest. How God the Father welcomed Him to the work, and anointed Him without measure with the Holy Ghost and with power, to be a Prophet to teach us, a Priest to forgive us, and a King to rule over us, for ever and ever!

1. But when the Psalmist speaks of God Himself anointing him with oil, does he not mean us to infer that a devout life is a feast, in which God is the Host, and we are the guests? That God welcomes us as to a feast every time we wait upon Him; that He is glad to see us glad, and happy to make us happy; and with no niggardly, but with a bountiful hand, He pours upon us His best and most precious gifts, especially the gift which we most of all require—the unction of the Holy One, His own Holy Spirit—ever symbolized by *oil* throughout the Scriptures—that we may be visibly, as well as consciously, the children of God, daily illustrating the beauty of His character and the fulfilment of the promise—“They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures.”

2. But we must have a *fresh anointing* every day.

§ The Prepared Table.

In Christ Jesus we are a royal priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God in Him. But to do this we must, like David, be anointed with *fresh* oil. Nothing stale comes from God; His gifts are ever new and always fresh. We need not mourn over the grace, the joy, and the power of our bye-gone days, as though they could not be renewed; for God's stores are inexhaustible and ever ready to come to us afresh. Let us go every morning to Him to be anointed with "fresh oil," that we may thus be equipped for every day's duties, for only thereby can we keep up the consciousness that we are His welcome guests, and execute the priestly office of offering those sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, which are ever acceptable, through Christ our Lord.

This oil is also called "*the oil of gladness*," inasmuch as it tends to make us "bright, smooth, and fragrant." The one great need of the world is glad hearts and bright faces, to cheer and encourage the sad and suffering toilers of our race: and surely we lack the characteristics of God's children, and blight our own usefulness, unless we have these. But if we have them, as most assuredly we shall, if we are daily renewed by the Holy Spirit, then shall we attract others to our God by the quiet possession of these truly Christian graces. Oh, who among us

The Prepared Table. 50

can realize the value of this anointing for ourselves, and for our influencing others for good, and not pray, "Lord, not my head only, but also my hands and my feet."

III. THE OVERFLOWING CUP.

1. The cup is *full*. There are times in the lives of most of us when our mind is so free from care, our heart so full of joy, and all our surroundings so very pleasant, that we may well compare our life to a cup full of God's loving-kindness. We say nothing now of the material of which the cup is made, whether it be gold, silver, brass, tin, or earthenware, for there is an endless variety in the material of which our lives are made up. We have to deal only with the ingredients, which taste as sweet from a tin cup as they do from a golden one. Oh, let us cease judging by the outside of the cup and platter, remembering that the gold cup of the rich may be full of gall and bitterness, while the common cup of the poor may be full of goodness and mercy.

Mention is made elsewhere of the "*cup of trembling*," and the "*cup of wrath*," as the due reward of evil doing: and, indeed, if we were left to drink the bitter results of our own sin, we should have been

of The Prepared Table.

like the Israelites, drinking of the water into which the object of their idolatry and sin, ground to powder, had been scattered. But our gracious Lord took our cups ; He passed, as it were, down the long line of sinful humanity, taking from each one the cup of shame or sorrow, of anguish or pain, of trembling or wrath, and emptied them into His cup, and thus "tasted death for every man" ; and He handed back their cups, full of His own loving-kindness ! So our cup is full of salvation because His was full of condemnation ; ours is full of joy and gladness, because His was full of sorrow and woe.

2. The cup *overflows*. God is not miserly in His benevolence. He does not measure out His blessings, as the apothecary measures his drachms, drop by drop. God's bounty always overflows. As in nature, which is so profuse with beauty and life, that every drop of the ocean, every square inch of the forest, teems with wonders which excite and defy the research of man ; so every faithful soul can at times perceive that his cup overflows with health, or comfort, or affection, or friendship, or with the peace and joy and hope of our holy religion. It is said of that eminent saint, John Welsh, of Ayr, that on one occasion he felt God's communicated

The Prepared Table. &c.

joys to be so overpowering that he cried out, "Lord, hold Thy hand, or the vessel will burst!"

God *means us* to be full and to overflow. Like those rocky basins hollowed out by the perpetual fall of water, and from which the overflow is ever passing out to fill some lesser bowl beneath, or to fertilize the thirsty soil. Let us not hoard up what we get, but let our cups freely flow over, and be a blessing to the waiting and wanting souls about us. Oh, let us not become like the miser, who fears to give lest he should not get. The supply is inexhaustible, and comes from our Father's treasury; and He bestows just in proportion as we dispense; He blesses just in proportion as we are a blessing; and no blessing is so great as that which is received and used for the good of others: thus exhibiting the truth of this testimony—

"THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES: THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP RUNNETH OVER."

VI.

Goodness and Mercy.

PSALM XXIII, 6.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

HERE we have a most logical conclusion to this most beautiful Psalm. St. Paul encourages the Roman Christians by assuring them that "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." So the Psalmist, after experiencing God's "goodness and mercy" under many circumstances, and through many years, finds that this experience worketh hope, that these blessings will continue to the end. Looking *back*, he recalls many difficulties and dangers in which he became involved, but through and out of them all the Lord has brought him; and now he looks *forward*, full of hope, feeling that the God of the past will be the God of the future—that goodness and mercy shall follow him all the days of his life: and

Goodness and Mercy. 50

that he will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

We are all very much tempted to reason the reverse way—to look at the *future first*—at to-morrow, next week, next year, and to wonder how we shall meet that difficulty, overcome that sorrow; how we shall manage to exist in the midst of so many and great dangers. Now let us just look to the *past*. Can we not recall many difficulties and dangers, many sorrows and trials? Yet God has, in some way or other, brought us through them all; for we are here, in this year of grace, and in this house of prayer and praise, the preserved monuments of His goodness and mercy. Well, if God has managed so well in the past, can we not trust Him to do the same in the future? Can we not from our past experience derive hope, even a sure and certain hope, that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life; and that we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever?

I. THE FOLLOWERS.

1. "*Goodness and Mercy.*" When a monarch's son goes on a journey attendants are appointed to accompany him, that he may be preserved from dangers, and that all his wants may be supplied. So when one of God's children goes on a journey

❧ Goodness and Mercy.

two attendants are told off to minister unto him, Goodness and Mercy. Not goodness alone, for as sinners we need forgiveness: and not mercy alone, for as children we need many things beside forgiveness. So Goodness and Mercy, like two guardian angels, come forth from God to minister unto us, and to be our escorts all the way. Goodness to supply our wants, and mercy to forgive our sins; goodness to provide for us, and mercy to pardon us; for "the Lord is good, and His mercy is everlasting."

Indeed, these two are more than guardian angels, they are the two great attributes of our God, which flow from Him spontaneously. As the fountain finds its expression in overflowing, and the river in running to the sea, so does God express Himself by overflowing with goodness and mercy. These blessings are laid up in the vast reservoir of God's nature, for the benefit of His poor, thirsty, way-faring children. Well might David, from the depths of his own experience, exclaim, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee!" And well might David, out of the fulness of his own gratitude, exclaim, for the benefit of all who come after him, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; and that He is rich in mercy!"

Goodness and Mercy. 50

2. "*Shall follow Me.*" In Eastern countries the shepherd always goes before his sheep; and our Good Shepherd never puts us forth to the walk, the work, or the warfare of any single day without going before us. But He does more than that. He not only goes before us Himself, but He appoints these two guardian angels, Goodness and Mercy, to bring up the rear. These two strong helpers are always closely following us, to keep our enemies at bay, to restore us when we wander, and to encourage and comfort us when we are weak or weary. The men and women of the world are always following after their pleasures, trying to overtake them, and never succeeding; but God sends His blessings after His people, and they follow them, as the water from the rock followed the Israelites, all through the wilderness.

Even when we wilfully go away from God these ministering angels still follow us. When a wayward son leaves home his mother does not forget him, her thoughts and prayers go after him, and who can measure the influence they exert over him? So when we leave God we are not forgotten. His goodness and mercy go after us; and they follow us very closely, though they are generally in disguise. We may not be conscious of their presence, or conscious

of Goodness and Mercy.

that they are following us. We may feel disappointed, frustrated, and crushed in our desires ; we may feel sad, lonely, and desolate in ourselves ; but may not, are not, these feelings the result of God's goodness and mercy ? Nothing can separate us from His love ! So that what we thus call evil or foe may be Goodness and Mercy, striving to induce us to retrace our steps to God.

3. "*All the days of my life.*" In spring days as well as autumn days ; in summer days as well as winter days ; in dark days as well as bright days ; in fast days as well as festival days ; in birthdays and wedding-days as well as dying days—in a word, no day shall ever dawn or set, throughout our future earthly life, in which these two Divinely commissioned attendants, Goodness and Mercy, shall not be our constant followers. One tells how, when on a highland moor, lost and exhausted, his heart beat with joy, as through the gloom he caught sight of two messengers, sent to search for him, and to bring him to comfort and safety. So may our hearts beat with joy when in our extremity we perceive that Goodness and Mercy are on our track, to find us, and to restore us to Him, "Whose mercy endureth for ever!"

Goodness and Mercy. so

And this truth is here sealed with "*Surely*." *Surely*, because God is always as good as His word, "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" *Surely*, because God hath never failed in the past, and hath pledged Himself by exceeding great and precious promises for the future! *Surely*, because we are His offspring, and where He is, there He would have us be also. Or the word may read, "*Only* Goodness and Mercy shall follow me," for there can be no evil to those who are the Lord's; for He will make all things work together for their good. Whatever, then, the days may be through which we have to pass, we can look up and take courage, for there are no "Ifs," no "Buts," with our God; it is all *surely, surely, surely!* May we all feel *surely, surely, surely!*

"Thine for ever: Thou our Guide,
All our wants by Thee supplied,
All our sins by Thee forgiven,
Lead us, Lord, from earth to heaven."

II. THE DWELLING.

I. "*The House of the Lord*." This will be the end of our journey and the consummation of our joy. It is as when the son of some great king, return-

ing from foreign travel to his father's dominions, and is welcomed at every stage of his journey with pomp and festival, until at last he enters his palace home, and sits down at his father's table. God provides for us here in the presence of our enemies ; here our wants are all supplied—manna in the wilderness, and water from the rock ; we eat in haste, staff in hand, for we are on a journey. But yonder we shall be in our Father's Kingdom, in His palace, and at His table. The journey will then be over, the vicissitudes will all be past, and we shall be at Home, with our Father, and in the joy of our Lord !

It has been said that our memory travels in a circle ; so that the nearer we get to the end of life, the nearer we are to the beginning of it. In the pride and strength of our youth we start off on our own research, wandering and struggling through the years ; but gradually the mind begins to long for the early scenes, the quiet days, and the calm, true love of our childhood's home. Like sheep, we are led by many ways, sometimes through sweet meadows, and sometimes over rugged hills ; sometimes in the sunshine, and sometimes in the shade ; but we are always being led to one place, to the safe fold of our Father's House, a fold into which no enemy enters, and from which no friend departs.

Goodness and Mercy. 50

2. "In the House of the Lord *for ever.*" As we pass on through life we are impressed by the want of *permanence*. It is felt by the rich as well as the poor, by the monarch as well as the people. We are sure of nothing, and know not how soon our all may be taken from us, or we from it. The revolving seasons, the setting sun, the falling leaf, the never ending change in persons and things, reminding us that we also are changing and passing away, and begetting within us a desire for a home which death cannot invade, for a friendship which time cannot impair, and for an existence which is impervious to the changes of this mortal life. Now this Psalm closes with this very prospect; it guides us through the changing scenes of life, but it guides us to "length of days," even the days of eternity in our Father's House, and the music which encourages and sustains us on our way is, "For ever and ever; for ever and ever!"

Our Father's House!—*Home!* What a magic charm and attractive power there is in that word Home! How it nerves the sailor in the storm, the soldier in the battle, and the traveller in unknown lands! How it softens the busy man of the world, melts into tenderness the hardened criminal, and draws from the ends of the earth the wayward

of Goodness and Mercy.

prodigal; for even amid the scenes of vice and misery he often has his tender memories, and will acknowledge the truth, and melt under the pathos of "Home, sweet Home!" Well, though at present we are but strangers and pilgrims on the earth, yet we have a Home to go to—a Home awaiting us, and prepared for us in Heaven, even the everlasting Home of our God and Father.

"What joys are lost, what hopes are given,
As thro' this death-struck world we roam.

We dream awhile that Home is Heaven;

We find at length that Heaven is Home."

3. "*I will dwell*," etc. The Psalmist is *quite sure* that he will "dwell in the House of the Lord for ever"—he has no doubt about it. Yet he had been a wandering sheep; his record was by no means pure; and his disposition at times was not such as was "meet for the Kingdom of Heaven." What made him so sure of dwelling there? Was it not the consciousness that the Good Shepherd could not be in the fold Himself, and leave His bleating sheep outside? "Where I am, there ye shall be also." And so, because we trust in Christ, and belong to Christ; because we have His Holy Spirit within us, assuring and preparing us for our inheritance; because we

Goodness and Mercy. 30

have the promise and oath of God, which make disappointment impossible, therefore the most humble and feeble among us may feel sure, that as, even now, we are dwelling in the outer or lower chamber of God's House, we shall ascend and dwell in the upper chamber of the House of the Lord for ever.

Need we wonder that this Psalm has attracted and influenced so many minds and souls of men? We are told of one great thinker of our day, who, wearied with the perplexing questions which disturb so many minds and souls in this strange age, and unable to subscribe to all the definitions and traditions of men, was pressed in his latter days to say—What was his creed, or in what did he put his trust? He raised himself up, and with slow, solemn pathos repeated the twenty-third Psalm. Then, turning to his questioner, he said, "That is my creed. I learned it in childhood from my mother's lips. I have repeated it every morning for many, many years. It has been my comforter and guide; for I feel that it has done much towards keeping me in the paths of righteousness; and I hope that, by following its spirit, I shall dwell in the House of the Lord for ever!"

Let us take this twenty-third Psalm, this Psalm of life, this Gospel in miniature, and read in it the Gospel of the Good Shepherd. Let us make it our

of Goodness and Mercy.

daily study, catch its spirit, and follow its leading ;
and we doubt not that we shall be able to look back
upon the past with pious gratitude to God, and look
forward to the future with this sweet confidence—

“SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL
THE DAYS OF MY LIFE : AND I WILL DWELL IN THE
HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR EVER.”

THE END.

THEOLOGY LIBRARY
CLAREMONT, CALIF.

A 25029

Printed by Curtis & Beamish, Ltd., Coventry.

Published by Messrs. SKEFFINGTON & SON,
34, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.

The Rev. Dr. A. G. MORTIMER'S
120 SERMONS FOR THE WHOLE YEAR.

2 Vols., Cr. 8vo, Cloth, Price 12/- net.

THE CHURCH'S LESSONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN YEAR. This important work by Dr. MORTIMER is now published in two handsome Cr. 8vo Volumes, price 12/- net. It consists of SIXTY SERMONS for the Sundays and chief Holydays on Texts from the OLD TESTAMENT LESSONS, and SIXTY SERMONS on Texts from the NEW TESTAMENT, appropriate to the occasion, thus forming a complete Year's Sermons, 120 in number, for Matins and Evensong.

The Church Times says: "We like these Sermons very much. They are full of wholesome thought and teaching, and very practical. Quite as good, spiritual and suggestive, as his 'Helps to Meditation.'"

The Guardian says: "Brief, plain and sound Church Sermons. We do not often notice a volume of Sermons we can praise with so few reservations."

Church Bells says: "Dr. Mortimer's many readers will joyfully welcome this new series of interesting and suggestive Sermons."

Cr. 8vo, Cloth, Price 5/- By most important Authors.

28 SERMONS ON SOCIAL SUBJECTS. Preached at St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden, under the auspices of the Christian Social Union. Compiled by the Rev. W. HENRY BLUNT, *Organiser and first Secretary of the Church Army Social Work.*

Among the extremely interesting CONTENTS may be named:—

"Vox Populi." The Right Rev. EDW. STUART TALBOT, Lord Bishop of Rochester.

"Purity." Hon. and Rev. E. LYTTETON, Head Master of Haileybury.

"Education." Rev. H. RUSSELL-WAKEFIELD, Rector of St. Mary's, Bryanston Square.

"The Church as Director of Public Conscience." The Very Rev. CHAS. WM. STUBBS, D.D., Dean of Ely.

"Religious Tolerance." Rev. T. C. FRY, D.D., Head Master of Berkhamstead.

"Voting as a Religious Duty." Rev. Canon HORSLEY, Rector of St. Peter's, Walworth.

"Employment of the Unemployable." Rev. W. CARLILE, Hon. Sec. of the Church Army.

"The Drink Traffic." Rev. Canon BARKER, Rector of Marylebone.

Five Sermons against Secularism.

"The Conscience." Rev. A. E. T. NEWMAN, M.A., Vicar of Granborough.

"The Progressiveness of Dogma." Rev. W. H. FRERE, Superior of the Community of the Resurrection.

"The Efficacy of Prayer." Rev. W. S. SWAYNE, Vicar of St. Peter's, Cranley Gardens.

"The Bible and Inspiration." Rev. R. T. TALBOT, Vicar of St. Werberg's, Derby.

"The Virgin Birth." Rev. H. B. JONES, of St. Giles'-in-the-Fields.

Etc., Etc.

Cr. 8vo, Cloth, Price 2/6

Sermons by Rev. Preb. C. J. RIDGEWAY.

IN PARADISE. A Course of Lectures given in Christ Church, Lancaster Gate, W., intended to be helpful to those who are called in God's love to pass "through the Valley of Weeping." CONTENTS. Those in Paradise:—I. What do we know about them?—II. Where are they?—III. How is it with them?—IV. What are the conditions of their life?—V. What are they doing?—VI. What are they to us, and What are we to them?

Cr. 8vo, Cloth, 2/6

By Rev. M. H. JAMES, LL.D., Vicar of St. Thomas', Hull, and Author of those successful Sermons, "Death—
and What Then?"

GOD AND HIS WITNESSES. (Isaiah xliii. 12.) A most striking and original series of Sermons on the Witnesses for God—Amongst the Scientists. Amongst His Creatures. Amongst the Rocks. Amongst the Stars. In Life and its Origin. Amongst the Materialists. Mors Janua Vitæ.

By the same Author. Cr. 8vo, Cloth, 2/-

DEATH—AND WHAT THEN? (1. What Swedenborgianism Teaches; 2. What Christian Science Teaches; 3. What Theosophy Teaches; 4. What Spiritualism Teaches; 5. What the Bible Teaches; 6. Immortality no Myth.)

"The examination of the various heterodoxies is well done, and the writer's acquaintance with the main results of modern psychology makes his discussion of Christian science and spiritualism useful."—**Church Times.**

"The reader will find this volume enlightening and inspiring."

—**The Church Family Newspaper.**

"The whole tone of the book is sound and thoughtful."

—**Church of Ireland Gazette.**

Cr. 8vo, Cloth, Price 3/6

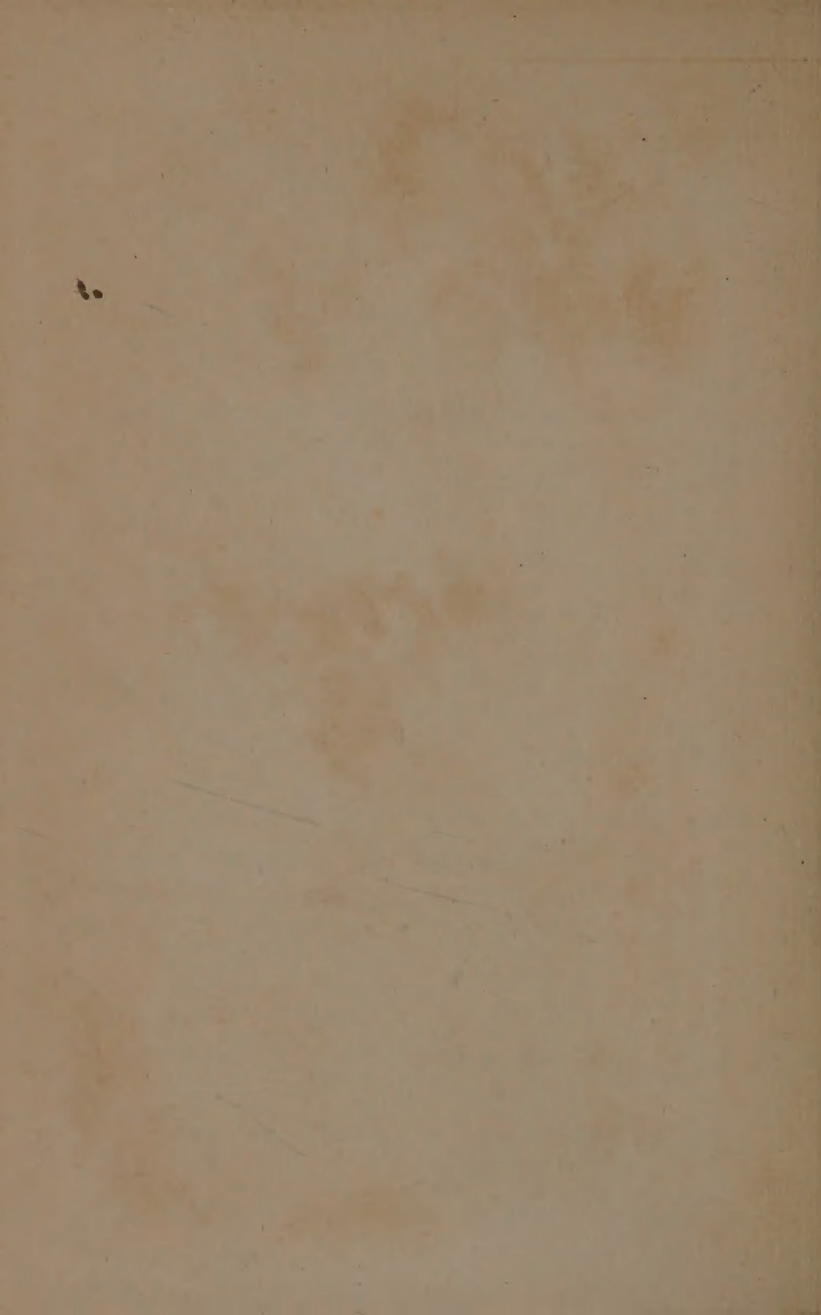
By the Rev. F. R. MONTGOMERY HITCHCOCK, M.A.,
Author of "Clement of Alexandria."

THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS. Studies in our Lord's Last Mission. Among the Contents of this most picturesque and interesting volume are:—The Last Mission—A Day of Questions—The Lord's Question—The Greek Strangers—The Final Rejection—The Vision of the End—The Anointing—The Bargain—The Washing of Feet—The Feast of Love Divine—The Agony—The Arrest—The Trial—Peter's Denial—The Court of Justice—The Picture and the Man. This book forms a connected narrative of the sayings and doings of the Master during His last great Mission to the Holy City; it describes the progress of the closing scenes of the tragedy of the earthly life and trials of the Son of Man, and draws a picture of the Christ as He faced and grappled with that solemn and profound mystery of His Cross and Passion.

LONDON:

Skeffington & Son, 34, Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.

Publishers to His Majesty the King.



BS1450 23d .D8
Duncan, Joseph R., 1843-1915.
The Psalm of life : expository sermons

BS Duncan, Joseph, 1843-1915.
1450 The Psalm of life : expository sermons on
23d Psalm XXIII / by Canon Duncan. -- London :
D8 Skeffington, 1904.
6lp. ; 20cm.

6 sermons.

1. Bible. O.T. Psalms XXIII--Sermons.
2. Church of England--Sermons. I. Title.

CCSC/mmb

A25029

